

Secrets of the Trade

Thirteen tried and true grantwriting tips

By Jeanne Clark

Anyone who writes grants wins some and loses some. You do research, write a lot of drafts, submit a final product, and then wait. Whether your project is selected or not, each submission offers an opportunity to learn. Here are some valuable lessons I've gleaned from my own successes and failures:

1) **Carefully read the request for proposal.** Highlight every requirement and follow the guidelines exactly! Note format requirements: length, size of font, number of copies, binding, etc. Don't expect to find all of the information you need in the "format" section; required information may also be "hidden" in the introductory text, guidelines, selection or scoring criteria, etc.

2) **Include the grant organization's goals in your request.** Don't tell them why you need money. Show them how your project will help meet their goals and how their funds can be leveraged to meet the goals of other agencies/programs, as well.

3) **Use a team approach for writing and submission.** Develop a grant writing team that includes people who contribute to technical sections. When appropriate, invite experts outside of the Service to contribute.

4) **Make sure the writing is clear and easy to read.** Use a good writer/editor to coordinate the submissions, style edit the writing, and eliminate unnecessary repetition. Make sure to use language that your reviewers will understand.

5) **Make your proposal easy to read.** Use boldface, bullets, different fonts, etc., within the limits of the requirements and good taste. Don't use a fancy cover, photos,

art, graphics, etc. to hide weak writing or a weak case. Avoid looking too "rich."

6) **Designate a "less involved" person as proofreader.** Did the spell check catch all of your errors? Is it easy to understand? Did you miss something important? Are appendices and map references accurate?

7) **Get good letters of support.** Letters of support can make a big difference if your proposal and others are essentially equal. Who would impress your reviewers? Prepare "talking points" to help letter writers prepare letters that are relevant to their organization and different from one another.

8) **Don't wait until the last minute.** Create a work timetable for getting all of the sections of the proposal completed — and stick with it. Also, make requests for letters of support early in the process; some elected officials get scores of requests, so you want them to get yours first! Identify sources for information you will need, such as maps, county plans, or recovery plans, and secure them right away.

9) **More is not better!** Most reviewers appreciate short, concise submissions. They may also eliminate proposals that seriously violate page limits.

10) **Carefully check all budget tables and dollars figures BEFORE you submit.** It's embarrassing to have them discover your calculation errors. Or to find one on your own and have to correct it after the review process has started.

11) **Pay attention to all scoring criteria that are described in the Request for Proposals.** If one section is worth 30 points and another is worth 5, put more energy into the section with the highest value.

12) **Emphasize your agency's credibility/track record.** List other grants you've received to show you are experienced in grant management.

13) **Follow up on rejections.** The best way to cut your losses is to find out why your grant wasn't selected so you do better the next time you submit one.

"Highlight every requirement and follow the guidelines exactly!"



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